

# Shaking Those Winter Blues

Whether you're in Michigan or Maine, California or Colorado, many of us have a tendency to experience the blues during the cold, gloomy winter months. In fact, many people suffer from a debilitating depression known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD). From the months of October to March, SAD sufferers may feel more sluggish, irritable and depressed and may lose interest in normal activities. They may crave sleep, or want to binge on carbohydrates (which often leads to winter weight gain).

Seasonal affective disorder, however, is only one of the many types of depressive disorders that affect one out of five men and women each year. Feelings of depression, whether caused by the cold, short days of winter, personal problems, or biological makeup, can affect all aspects of living, including your work, personal and social life. Clinical depression is not the same as a passing "blue" mood, and those affected cannot merely "pull themselves together." Unlike the blues, which generally pass in a few days, symptoms of depression can last for weeks, months or even years without proper treatment.

So, how do you know whether you or a loved one are suffering from clinical depression or just experiencing the blues? The following is a list of symptoms that are associated with clinical depression:

- Prolonged feelings of sadness, hopelessness or worthlessness
- Anxiety and irritability
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Sleeping and eating disturbances
- Loss of interest in friends and hobbies
- Decreased energy

If you've been experiencing a combination of the above symptoms for an extended period of time, and they are not due to a physical condition, you should consider seeking professional assistance. (However, if you are having any thoughts of death or suicide, we urge you to seek immediate help.)

Keep in mind that not all cases of the blues lead to depression. Often, you may be going through a funk and may just need to take extra special care of yourself. Here are some suggestions that may help lift your spirits during the rough times:

- Talk to someone – a friend, family member or co-worker.
- Be with other people. Try not to spend too much time by yourself.
- In the winter, try to spend as much time as you can outdoors. Natural sunlight has been known to do wonders to alleviate the winter doldrums.
- Participate in activities that make you feel good, such as your favorite hobby or sport. Exercise, especially, is a surefire way to boost your energy and your spirits.
- Surround yourself with people who make you feel good about yourself.
- Be aware of negative thought patterns and try consciously to change them.
- Avoid making any major life decisions. Feeling down can cloud your judgment, so wait until you feel better.

Remember, depression is an illness, not a sign of weakness. With the proper treatment, more than 80 percent of those suffering from depression improve. And with professional help most symptoms can be relieved within a short time.

Whether you're having a difficult time shaking those winter blues or are feeling like there is no hope, we can help. We're here 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All calls are completely confidential.



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